

Message Text

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PAGE 01 RIYADH 00394 232016Z
ACTION SS-15

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 A-01 CPR-01 NSCE-00 SSO-00
/028 W

-----005798 232050Z /72S

O 231710Z DEC 77 ZFF-4

FM USLO RIYADH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 216

INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA NIACT IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L USLO RIYADH 394

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP, SOCI, SA (CARTER, JIMMY)

SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS ON SAUDI ATTITUDES TOWARD OFFICIAL VISITS

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1. AS WE MOVE CLOSER TO THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT AND AS THE ADVANCE ARRIVES FOR DETAILED IN DEPTH PLANNING OF THE PRESIDENT'S PROGRAM, I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE SOME OBSERVATIONS REGARDING SAUDI THINKING TOWARD THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT. FROM THE PRE-ADVANCE PARTY AND SUBSEQUENT TELEGRAMS, WE HAVE A GOOD IDEA OF THE CONSIDERATIONS AND GUIDELINES WHICH ARE TO BE FOLLOWED IN PLANNING PRESIDENT'S VISIT

THESE INCLUDE AMONG OTHERS A REDUCTION IN TIME SPENT ON PURELY CEREMONIAL EVENTS, THE SCHEDULING OF MEETINGS AS CLOSE TOGETHER AS POSSIBLE TO AVOID GAPS OF UNUSED TIME, HOLDING STATE DINNERS AS LAST EVENT IN DAY'S SCHEDULE, KEEPING SCHEDULE OF MRS. CARTER'S TIME AS CLOSE TO THAT OF PRESIDENT'S AS POSSIBLE, AND PREFERENCE THAT PRESIDENT'S TALKS WITH HEAD OF STATE OR GOVERNMENT BE ALONE. THESE HAVE BEEN VERY HELPFUL GUIDELINES FOR OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH SAUDI OFFICIALS.

2. THERE ARE, HOWEVER, SAUDI CONSIDERATIONS WHICH NEED TO BE MESHED INTO OURS. I WISH TO SHARE MY PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT SOME OF THESE CONSIDERATIONS ARE IN THE HOPE THAT THEY WILL
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BRING A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF SAUDI REACTION TO PROPOSED SCHEDULE AND TO ISSUES RAISED IN SUBSEQUENT SESSIONS WITH THE ADVANCE PEOPLE.

3. FIRST AND FOREMOST, THE SAUDIS WANT A SMOOTH AND SUCCESSFUL VISIT. FROM THE DAY OF ITS ANNOUNCEMENT SAUDIS HAVE SWELLED WITH PRIDE THAT PRESIDENT IS VISITING SAUDI ARABIA. THEY WILL PERMIT

NOTHING TO INTERFERE IN ITS SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION AND THE SAUDIS ARE MASTERS AT ARRANGING OFFICIAL VISITS. THERE IS A NEVER ENDING STREAM OF OFFICIAL VISITORS TO THIS CAPITOL. AT ONE POINT, FOR EXAMPLE, THEY MANAGED 15 HEADS OF STATE IN 23 DAYS. THEY BELIEVE THEY KNOW HOW TO PUT A VISIT TOGETHER SUCCESSFULLY AND WILL ACT ACCORDINGLY IN PLANNING SESSIONS WHICH LIE AHEAD.

4. ONE MAJOR INFLUENCE ON SAUDI THINKING ABOUT THE VISIT IS THAT THE GUEST - IN THIS CASE THE PRESIDENT - IS RULER OF THE HOUSE. WHATEVER THE PRESIDENT WISHES IS HIS COMMAND. THE NATURAL ARAB HOSPITALITY WILL FLOW TOWARD THE PRESIDENT AND HIS PARTY. WHAT MUST ALWAYS BE IN MIND, THOUGH, IS THAT TO AN EXTENT THE SAUDIS WILL BE DOING WHAT THEY AND THEIR CULTURE SAY WILL MAKE THE PRESIDENT HAPPY. THIS THEN IS THE CULTURAL INFLUENCE WHICH WILL AFFECT THE VISIT IN SEVERAL WAYS.

5. IN ARAB SOCIETY TIME IS AT ONCE EXTREMELY IMPORTANT AND ENTIRELY IRRELEVANT. SPECIFICALLY, THE PROPER "SENSE" OF TIMING IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT. THE INNUMERABLE BREAKS FOR COFFEE WILL FLOW NATURALLY IN THE COURSE OF THE VISIT - NEITHER TAKING TOO MUCH TIME NOR BEING TOO RUSHED. THE GREETINGS ON ARRIVAL AT THE AIRPORT OR THE PALACE WILL MOVE FORWARD SMOOTHLY BUT NOT SO RIGIDLY AS TO ELIMINATE THE VERY NECESSARY GREETINGS AND PLEASANTRIES THAT PASS BETWEEN GUEST AND HOST. CONSEQUENTLY, TIME BY THE CLOCK IS IRRELEVANT. IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHOW PROPER RESPECT AND A WARM WELCOME TO A GUEST; IT IS NOT IMPORTANT TO LEAVE

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THE AIRPORT OR TO ARRIVE AT DINNER AT A FIXED TIME. FOR EXAMPLE, IT IS CUSTOMARY IN ARAB SOCIETY FOR AN ARAB TO GREET HIS GUEST AT THE DOOR OF HIS HOUSE. HE WOULD NOT COMPREHEND THE LOGIC OF SAVING FIFTEEN MINUTES BY HAVING THE GUEST ACCOMPANY THE HOST TO HIS HOME. IN THE END THE INFORMALITY AND EASE OF EVENTS AND PARTICIPANTS WILL COMBINE FOR THE SMOOTH NATURAL FLOW OF THE VISIT.

6. IN SAUDI SOCIETY WOMEN HAVE A STATUS CERTAINLY STRANGE TO US BUT PECULIAR EVEN TO MOST OTHER ARABS. SAUDIS BEING STRICT MUSLIMS BELIEVE IT IMMORAL TO HAVE THEIR WOMEN SEEN IN PUBLIC OR BE IN A PUBLIC PLACE. THUS WOMEN ARE VEILED AND RARELY SEEN OUT OF THEIR HOMES. THEY NEVER PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC FUNCTIONS. REGARDING MRS. CARTER, THE SAUDIS WILL DISPLAY WARMTH AND HOSPITALITY AND, THUS, THEY HAVE AGREED THAT THE KING AND ROYAL PARTY WILL GREET MRS. CARTER ON ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE. THEY WILL NOT, HOWEVER, CONSIDER HER OR HIGHLIGHT HER PRESENCE AT OTHER EVENTS. THEY WERE FIRM THAT SHE NOT BE PRESENT FOR COFFEE AND THEN FOR TALKS WITH THE KING. ORDINALLY, THEY ALSO OBJECTED TO DINNER AT SAME TIME AS OFFICIAL DINNER FOR PRESIDENT ON GROUNDS THAT IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR WOMEN TO EAT AFTER THE MEN. THEY RELUCTANTLY AGREED TO A CHANGE IN TIME FOR MRS. CARTER'S DINNER BUT AGAIN WERE DETERMINED THAT THE DINNER BEGIN AT LEAST

ONE HALF HOUR LATER THAN PRESIDENT'S TO INSURE THAT ALL MALE GUESTS WERE INSIDE PALACE AND DULY OCCUPIED BEFORE FEMALE GUESTS BEGAN TO ARRIVE. THEY HAVE OBJECTED TO ANY TEA OR OTHER GATHEREING OF SAUDI WOMEN FOR MRS. CARTER SAYING NO RESPECTABLE SAUDI WOULD PERMIT HIS WIFE TO BE SEEN IN A PUBLIC PLACE SO FULL OF MEN AS THE GUEST PALACE.

7. THE QUESTION OF PARTICIPANTS IN TALKS WILL BE INFLUENCED BY SAUDI TRADITION. ON THE VISITOR'S SIDE, THE SAUDIS HAVE ALWAYS SAID IT IS UP TO THE GUEST TO DECIDE WHO HE WISHES TO HAVE PARTICIPATE IN TALKS. THE SAUDI PARTICIPATION IS MORE COMPLEX. THE PRESIDENT WILL BE DRIVING DIRECTLY FROM AIRPORT TO THE GUEST PALACE IN THE COMPANY OF THE KING, CROWN PRINCE, PRINCE ABDULLAH AND OTHER KEY MEMBERS OF ROYAL FAMILY. COURT PROTOCOL DICTATES CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT THESE FAMILY MEMBERS PROCEED INTO THE WAITING ROOM WITH THE KING AND THE PRESIDENT FOR COFFEE ON ARRIVAL AT THE GUEST PALACE. THERE IS NO ACCEPTABLE WAY FOR THESE FAMILY MEMBERS TO BE EXCLUDED OR LATER ASKED TO LEAVE TO ENABLE PRESIDENT TO MEET PRIVATELY WITH THE KING. ON THE OTHER HAND, HIS MAJESTY AND THE PRESIDENT CANNOT EXCUSE THEMSELVES FOR PRIVATE TALKS. THERE ARE SPECIAL POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS AT THE COURT IN RIYADH IN THESE DAYS OF KING KHALID'S RULE THAT DETERMINE FACT THAT BOTH CROWN PRINCE AND PRINCE ABDULLAH WILL BE WITH KING DURING TALKS WITH THE PRESIDENT. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT IN THE DAYS OF KING FEISAL WHEN HE EXERCISED SUCH A DETERMINATE INFLUENCE ON EVENTS; BUT TODAY'S LEADERSHIP IS MORE COLLECTIVE AND THIS WILL DICTATE THE PRESENCE OF AT LEAST PRINCE FAHD AND PRINCE ABDULLAH IN THE FIRST ROUND OF TALKS.

8. IN SUBSTANTIVE TERMS THE MOST IMPORTANT TALKS WILL BE WITH THE CROWN PRINCE, PRINCE FAHD. THE KING IS THE KING AND DEFERENCE TO HIM IS MANDATORY - HENCE THE FIRST ROUND OF TALKS; BUT PRINCE FAHD IS THE CENTRAL FIGURE IN FOREIGN POLICY AS MUCH BY THE KING'S CHOICE AS BY PRINCE FAHD'S PERSONAL INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. IT IS FAR MORE IMPORTANT FOR US TO CONSIDER WHO WE WISH TO PARTICIPATE ON U.S. SIDE IN THIS ROUND OF TALKS THAN THE ROUND WITH HIS MAJESTY. ON THE SAUDI SIDE THE CROWN PRINCE USUALLY IS ACCOMPANIED BY A FEW SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY SUCH AS PRINCE ABDULLAH, PRINCE SULTAN MINISTER OF DEFENSE), AND PRINCE SAUD (MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS). THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IF TALKS ARE LIKELY TO INCLUDE SUBJECTS RELATING TO THEIR SPECIFIC AREAS. IT IS OFTEN TRUE, HOWEVER, THAT PRINCE FAHD MAY INDICATE PRIOR TO A MEETING THAT HE PREFERENCES TO BE ALONE WITH A VISITOR. THERE WILL BE NO FOOLPROOF WAY OF KNOWING THIS IN ADVANCE. ONCE AGAIN ARAB SENSE OF TIMING AND PROTOCOL WILL GOVERN THE OCCASION. WE SHOULD BE FLEXIBLE ENOUGH TO RESPOND IN EITHER DIRECTION. CONFIDENTIAL

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9. IN CONCLUSION I WOULD REPEAT THAT SAUDIS WILL DO EVERYTHING THEY CAN TO INSURE THAT THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO RIYADH IS A SUCCESS. THEY WILL MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO MEET THE PRRESIDENT'S REQUESTS. THEY HAVE, AT SAME TIME, MANY CULTURAL AND SOCIAL TRADITIONS WHICH WE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET WITH FLECIBILITY AND IMAGINATION. TIMING IS IMPORTANT BUT NOT AT THE EXPENXE OF OFFENDING THE HOST'S SENSE OF WHAT IS PROPER. PARTICIPANTS IN TALKS AND AT DINNER ARE IMPORTANT TOO, BUT AGAIN NOT AT THE EXPENSE OF EMBARRASSMENT TO OUR HOST. THESE ARE AREAS THAT WILL BE RESOLVED NATURALLY IN THE COURSE OF PLANNING FOR THE VISIT AND SHOULD NOT CAUSE US UNDUE CONCERN. WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO US AS TO THE SAUDIS IS A SUCCESSFUL VISIT. THIS COMMON DESIRE COUPLED WITH A SENSITIVITY ON OUR PART TO PARTICULAR CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS OF SAUDI ARABIS WILL PRODUCE PQAT SUCCESSFUL VISIT.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: VISITS
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977RIYADH00394
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Litigation Code IDs:
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Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 RIYADH 393
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13-Apr-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 138737
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OBSERVATIONS ON SAUDI ATTITUDES TOWARD OFFICIAL VISITS
TAGS: OVIP, SOCI, SA, (CARTER, JIMMY)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/05bdcafd-c188-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009